



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Loneliness and Isolation Strategy

Integrated impact assessment summary



The Welsh Government is developing its first strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation and build stronger social connections.

Tackling loneliness and social isolation is a long-term challenge. This strategy is the Welsh Government's first step in tackling these issues, which we know are complex and affect many different groups of people.

Increasingly we understand the impact being lonely and/or socially isolated can have on our physical and mental health, and therefore the importance of the relationships we have with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours in giving us our sense of belonging and well-being.

Our ambition is for Wales to be a country which supports these connections between people and where we build on people's strengths to ensure everyone has the opportunity to develop positive and meaningful relationships regardless of their age, status, circumstances or identity.

We are all likely to experience times when we feel lonely or socially isolated: being bullied at school; moving from school to university; starting a new job or the end of a loving relationship. The Wales we want is one where people are aware of these trigger points in life, know how to prevent these feelings from having an impact on their well-being, or are supported when they do, and do not feel stigmatised for asking for help or saying "I'm lonely".

In line with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, this strategy focuses on approaches that reduce the risk of, or prevent, loneliness and social isolation or that intervene early, before these become more entrenched. These approaches include encouraging people to understand the trigger points of loneliness and social isolation and to build emotional and psychological resilience to equip them to cope and respond. However, we also need to ensure support is available for those who are already lonely and socially isolated, or who, despite our best efforts, become so, and this is also a feature of the strategy.

The Welsh Government held a public consultation on how best to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Wales from October 2018 to January 2019. This set out our 'current offer' in terms of work being undertaken across a range of key policy areas within Welsh Government, using existing legislative and strategic frameworks. None of the respondents to the consultation indicated they wanted a fundamentally different offer from Welsh Government. The overriding message was it needed to do more in the areas where it is already taking action, or needed to do things differently in these areas in order to make more of an impact, including how it encouraged and influenced other partners to take action.

In developing this strategy therefore we have sought to maximise the potential benefits of government action across a range of policy areas using all available levers to encourage and promote action to tackle loneliness and social isolation. We have also sought to maximise the impact of existing funding streams across Welsh Government by considering how their objectives and outcomes can better align with our ambition for reducing loneliness and social isolation. The strategy contains a number of cross-cutting policies and commitments to benefit all of society, alongside recognising there are certain groups within society at greater risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation and for whom more tailored support is required.

It was clear from the consultation responses that Government alone cannot solve these issues and the strategy seeks to enable all parts of society to play a role. Whilst Government cannot create communities, it can foster environments where these links are broadened and deepened. The strategy therefore focuses on the role Government can play but also how it can support local authorities, wider public services, the third sector and also the private sector. In addition, it describes the important role that we all as individuals can play in supporting and looking out for each other and our communities.

How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

To help inform the strategy we have engaged with a number of stakeholders about what they consider important and established a strategy development board of both internal and external stakeholders. We have undertaken extensive research and have worked with the UK and Scottish Governments, both of which have published strategies, to share insights and learn from one another.

Based on this, between October 2018 and January 2019 we undertook a 12-week public consultation on how best to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Wales.

We also hosted engagement events in different parts of Wales to enable people to come along and tell us what mattered to them.

Children's representative groups were invited to feed into the consultation to develop the final strategy and a children and young person's version of the consultation document was also published to help seek views from this group.

We received over 230 responses from individuals and organisations as well as preparing written summaries from the four engagement events. We analysed these responses and drew out the key themes in order to understand what people and organisations had told us which were used to help us develop the final version of the strategy.

What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

The strategy itself seeks to tackle existing negative impacts that prevent certain people or groups from being able to connect with others. As a result the strategy is expected to have a positive impact in a number of areas. While the strategy sets out an overarching approach to tackling the issues, it does also recognise that some groups experience loneliness and social isolation more prevalently than others. The strategy sets out some specific actions and initiatives in order to provide more direct focus on these areas:

- some groups with protected characteristics (older and younger people, disabled people, etc)
- those who live in rural communities.

The strategy will promote good practice within existing and future policy by ensuring that loneliness and social isolation is considered with a greater emphasis as policies are developed (through increased measuring of loneliness and social isolation issues in various monitoring tools and internally through cohesive policy development).

In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal: – maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or – avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

The strategy will aim to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and learning across Public Service Boards (and also Regional Partnership Boards) through workshops. These will explore the extent to which loneliness and social isolation is considered to be a priority across Wales, share examples of good practice in terms of what factors are associated with successful programmes/projects and consider barriers to action and how these can be overcome. Public Service Boards were established under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 to improve the

economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in their area by working together to achieve the well-being goals set out in the Act.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act also requires Welsh Ministers to publish national indicators to measure the achievement of the seven well-being goals for Wales contained in the Act. One of the 46 national indicators which is currently used to measure how Wales is progressing against the seven well-being goals is the percentage of people who are lonely.

This is monitored through questions in the National Survey for Wales, with the inclusion of other relevant questions enabling analysis of other aspects of people's lives relevant to loneliness and social isolation (e.g. age, household type and other demographic factors). Social loneliness refers to the absence of an acceptable social network, that is, a wider circle of friends and acquaintances that can provide a sense of belonging, of companionship and of being a member of a community. Whilst this does not capture social isolation as defined earlier, it is possible to gain an indication of the proportion and circumstances of those people responding negatively, and to monitor this over time. Through implementation of the strategy we will consider the feasibility of measuring social isolation, as defined in this strategy, through the National Survey (using a recognised scale).

How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

In order to assess this strategy's effectiveness in addressing loneliness and social isolation in a comprehensive manner, an evaluability assessment will be undertaken. The use of this approach to informing evaluation has grown in recent years, providing a systematic and transparent account of how the proposed work will result in the desired goals, the methods that will be used to assess progress towards these goals and the data sources necessary to do so, including existing gaps. This assessment will be published and underpin future evaluation.

As stated we will also consider the feasibility of formally measuring social isolation through the National Survey, using a recognised scale.

The strategy commits to establishing the evidence base to understand more the causes and impacts of loneliness and social isolation for different ages and different groups and identify effective ways to address and prevent them. The strategy identifies an additional £1.4 million available over the next three years for a Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund to test out innovative approaches to tackling loneliness and social isolation and/or scale up promising approaches to reaching out to those who are already lonely and/or socially isolated.

We will use the projects supported by the Fund and data from the National Survey to help build our knowledge. We will continue to explore how we can contribute to evidence-building and sharing through our Loneliness and Social Isolation Advisory Group including what specific research is required.

The longer term success of the Welsh Government's approach and this strategy will be assessed against the loneliness indicator and these other national indicators, and achieving a reduction in the prevalence of social and emotional loneliness. In the short term however, we expect to see an increase in those who report they are lonely as we raise awareness and people feel more able to recognise and talk about it.